

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 /066 W

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8357

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 5492

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TAGS: PINS, PFOR, RP, LY, XF

SUBJ: ALLEGED SPLIT IN MNLF AND OTHER MINDANAO DEVELOPMENTS

REF: A) MANILA 5393(NOTAL); B) MANILA 1008; C) MANILA 5305

SUMMARY: ACCORDING GOP'S LATEST PUBLICITY PLOY SOME MNLF LEADERS HAVE REJECTED MISUARI LEADERSHIP AND ACCEPTED POSITIONS ON PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT. IN FACT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT MISUARI HAS ACCEPTED GOP POSITION ON PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OR REFERENDUM (AND EMBASSY HAS REPORT THAT MNLF HAS RENEWED EARLIER CALL FOR PEACEFUL BOYCOTT OF REFERENDUM). THERE IS GROWING AWARENESS AMONG MUSLIMS THAT ISLAMIC CONFERENCE HAS TAKEN SERIOUS EXCEPTION TO MARCOS-QADHAFI PREEMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS, AND CONTINUING SPECULATION THAT THERE MAY STILL BE LAST MINUTE POSTPONEMENT OF APRIL 17 REFERENDUM. AT MARCOS BEHEST CARDINAL SIN HAS URGED MINDANAO BISHOPS TO IMPRESS ON JITTERY CHRISTIANS CONTINUING NEED FOR RESTRAINT. END SUMMARY.

1. MANILA PRESS OF APRIL 14/15 ALLEGES MAJOR SPLIT IN MNLF LEADERSHIP RESULTING FROM NUR MISUARI EFFORTS TO "PURGE" NON-TAUSUG MEMBERS. ACCORDING STORY, THREE
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MNLF CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS (UNNAMED), TWO IN LANA O AND ONE IN COTABATO, HAVE DECIDED TO DEFY NUR AND ACCEPT POSITIONS ON PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT. (WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION OF EARLIER PRESS REPORT FROM JIDDA THAT NUR HAS AGREED TO ESTABLISHMENT OF PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT.)

2. UNTIL TODAY GUIDED PRESS WAS PREDICTING IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF MNLF/ISLAMIC CONFERENCE DELEGATION, INCLUDING NUR MISUARI, TO PARTICIPATE IN PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT. PURGE STORY, PROBABLY FABRICATED, INDICATES THAT GOP IS RETURNING TO TRADITIONAL TACTIC OF PLAYING ON ETHNIC AND OTHER TENSIONS WITHIN MNLF TO DEFLECT SUPPORT FROM NUR AND HOSTILE HARDCORE.

3. MANILA MUSLIM INTELLIGENTSIA IS NOW AWARE THAT ISLAMIC CONFERENCE HAS TAKEN SERIOUS EXCEPTION TO BILATERAL PHILIPPINE-LIBYAN AGREEMENT AND IS APPARENTLY SUPPORTING NUR MISUARI IN HIS CONTINUING OBJECTIONS TO REFERENDUM. MISSIONARY-SCHOLAR PETER GOWING TOLD EMBOFF YESTERDAY THAT IN LANA O (WHERE HE LIVES) RELATIVELY SMALL MNLF HARDCORE HAS NEVER SWERVED FROM ANTI-REFERENDUM POSITION. RECENT INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY INDICATES THAT MNLF HAS AGAIN ISSUED INSTRUCTIONS FOR PEACEFUL BOYCOTT OF REFERENDUM.

4. CONTINUING GOVERNMENT INSISTENCE ON BINDING NATURE OF VAGUE QADHAFI-MARCOS "FORMULA," AS INTERPRETED BY GOP, IS SOUNDING INCREASINGLY HOLLOW. ALTHOUGH OFFICIALS (INCLUDING PRESIDENT) ARE STILL CLAIMING BOTH PRIVATELY AND IN PUBLIC THAT APRIL 17 REFERENDUM WILL TAKE PLACE, MANY MINDANAO WATCHERS BELIEVE THAT YET ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT WILL BE LEAST PAINFUL WAY OUT FOR MARCOS. HOWEVER, WITH ONLY THREE DAYS LEFT BEFORE SCHEDULED POLLING, SUCH A MANEUVER WOULD BE MOST BLATANT ILLUSTRATION OF REGIME NON-CREDIBILITY TO DATE.
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5. CARDINAL SIN TOLD AMBASSADOR YESTERDAY THAT, AT MARCOS BEHEST, HE MET WITH SOUTHERN BISHOPS AND IMPRESSED ON THEM NEED FOR CHRISTIAN RESTRAINT TO AVOID COMMUNAL BLOODBATH IN DAYS AHEAD. BISHOPS AGREED ON NEED FOR RESTRAINT BUT WERE GENERALLY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT SITUATION. HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN SCATTERED INCIDENTS AND SOME AFP CASUALTIES IN SOUTH OVER PAST WEEKS, CEASEFIRE GENERALLY IS STILL HOLDING. THIS IS NOTABLY TRUE FOR JOLO AND COTABATO WHERE STRONGEST REBEL MAIN FORCE UNITS ARE LOCATED.
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